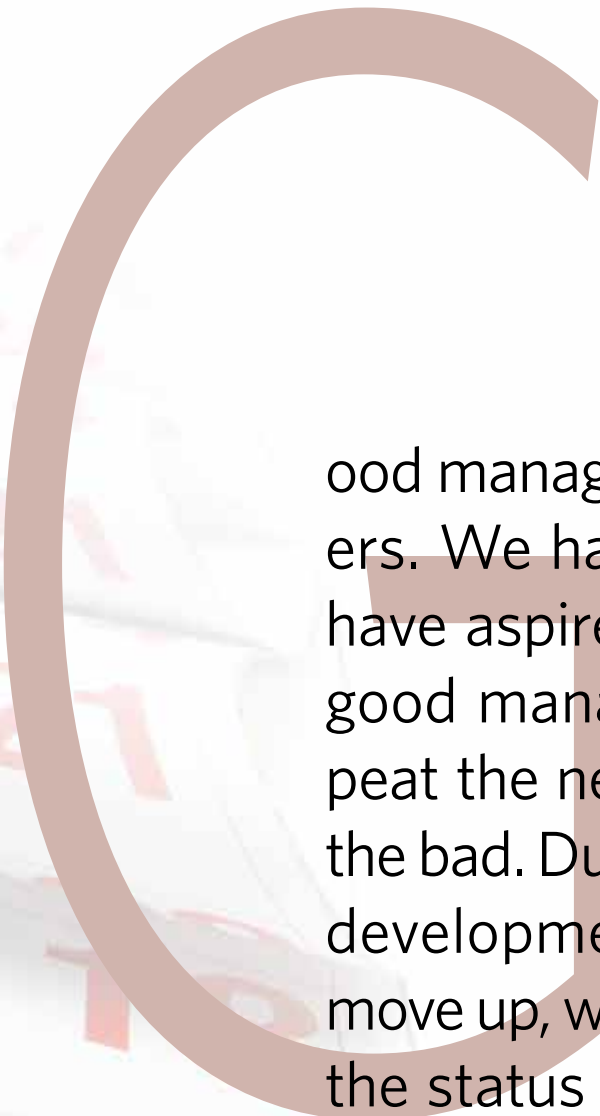


The First 100 Days

of an Acquisition Workforce Manager

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ood managers and bad managers. We have all had both and have aspired to learn from the good managers and never repeat the negative influences of the bad. During our professional development, if we excel and move up, we one day may attain the status of “manager of others.” Some new managers within the acquisition workforce benefit from formal training and mentorship programs, while others

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do not. Regardless of the path taken to the title, success evolves from one's plan.

Success is not an accident. It is earned through planning, hard work and the attainment of goals. The focus of this article is to relay the importance of a formal plan laying out a new manager's first 100 days on the job within the acquisition workforce. It discusses steps to take in achieving milestones within the first 100 days as well as pitfalls to avoid.

The Challenge

As in life, the first impression is very important for a new manager. Newly appointed managers enjoyed success in their previous careers and would very much like to succeed in the new role of manager. However, things have changed. The dynamics of peer and subordinate interaction have changed. Expectations and one's role within the organization are different. And the way the new manager is perceived has shifted. With that new title, you may no longer be one of the "guys." The challenge is to develop a plan that allows you to make the transition effectively. This is not as easy as it sounds. Managing others is not easy. There is no ready-made template for success once you become a manager. Each situation is different because everyone is unique.

Establish a Plan

Establishing a written plan with milestones throughout the first 100 days on the job is critical for the new manager. Success starts with a plan that maps out where you want to be when the plan is completed. The first step in developing this plan is to analyze the organizational environment to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your personnel. Take the time to learn the employees' roles. Get to know personally the employees in your unit. A manager who takes the time to do these simple things will be more successful in developing a plan for the first 100 days. A number of milestones need to be incorporated within this plan.

Clear Expectations

Subordinates should never be in doubt about the expectations of a new manager. Expectations should be clear and understood throughout the workplace. Expectations allow everyone to know what is important and document where everyone should be headed as an organization. While setting expectations, develop both realistic and challenging expectations for your subordinates to work toward. Many employees seek guidance and challenges. They want to succeed and to know that their contributions are appreciated. Confusion about expectations, roles and goals is detrimental to the group's success and ultimately undermines the manager's ability to lead effectively.

A Communications Plan

Good communication is important in any working environment. Employees want to know the expectations, develop the trust and respect of their peers and managers and receive guidance without going out of their way to find it. Few

situations are more disheartening than wondering whether the manager respects the employee enough to take the time to interact on a personal level. Employees want to know what is going on within their working environment and to maintain a certain level of situational awareness.

Establishing a communications plan that works for the environment accomplishes these important aspects of good communication. The challenge for the new personnel manager is to determine what works best. In some organizations, routine face-to-face meetings work. In other organizations, formal meetings are avoided at all costs. Emails have become the de facto method to communicating in many organizations. If that is the case, ensure that the face-to-face communication does not disappear altogether. It also is important to note that some employees need more attention and guidance than others. The time spent to develop relationships with employees plays a critical role in identifying their needs.

In addition to establishing a method to communicate with the employees, it is essential to encourage feedback and provide a method for it. Employee feedback is essential if a manager is to understand what works and what does not. Feedback also is a key tenet in soliciting ideas for improvement. The single greatest complaint from an overwhelming number of employees is that management does not take their feedback and ideas seriously.

Individual Development Plans (IDP)

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) plays a critical role in an employee's career. Therefore, every employee should have one. The IDP formally documents a plan to improve an employee professionally, and in many cases personally as well. It encourages employees to seek and attain goals and accomplishments that they might not achieve otherwise. The IDP may document the path to a college degree or identify formal certifications that will increase the employee's value and productivity for the organization. The IDP also shows the employee that the manager is interested in his or her professional development and achievement of the stated goals.

The IDP helps the manager evaluate the employee, identifying areas where improvement is needed and providing a tool for documenting an employee's progress and development. IDPs truly are tools that benefit the employee as well as the manager. The time and effort taken in developing these plans are well worthwhile. In addition, the process of developing an IDP for each employee enables a manager to get to know the employee personally and professionally.

A Training Plan

Once IDPs have been developed for each subordinate, the next step for the manager is to develop and establish a formal training plan. This plan may include formal training from professional vendors as well as impromptu or on-the-job training lessons. The key aspect is to ensure that the schedule of training lessons is tailored for the benefit of the employees.

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The training plan should focus on the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to do the respective job more effectively. For example, a project management office may provide training that focuses on project management, possibly resulting in a professional certification for the employee.

An effective method for developing training topics and presentations involves assigning training topics to subordinates and tasking them to develop and provide the training. The employees learn in a collaborative environment, gain a sense of accomplishment and play significant roles in improving the effectiveness of the group. Employees also develop presentation and training skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.

A Recognition Program

Employees want to be recognized for their contributions to the organization. The systematic failure to recognize employee efforts inevitably will lead to resentment and disillusionment. These feelings, if unmitigated, eventually will create a counterproductive workplace. Unfortunately, it only takes one or two individuals who feel this way to create a negative impact on the workplace.

Therefore, if a formal recognition program is in place, use it. If such a program is not in place, establish one, even if it is only within the immediate workplace. Such a program reinforces the employees' sense of worth, establishes relationships and develops an atmosphere of trust and respect.

Develop Professionally

It is important to spend some time during the first 100 days to develop yourself professionally. Many new managers lack

proficiency in managerial tasks such as personnel evaluations or strategic planning. Identify an area that you need to work on and take steps to develop the necessary knowledge, skill or ability to become better. In doing so, you exhibit the willingness to lead by example. If you expect your subordinates to actively develop as professionals, it helps to show a willingness to develop yourself professionally.

Avoid Pitfalls

Avoid the common pitfalls of the first-time manager. Common pitfalls include making significant changes too quickly, not getting to know the employees and not understanding the workplace environment. An additional pitfall many fall into involves failing to understand and use the right methods to praise and criticize.

First, take the time to understand the workplace and the organizational culture before making changes. All organizations are different. The organizational culture is a reflection of the personal characteristics of all the employees, as well as the dominant influences within the workplace. A new manager's plan must take this into account during the first 100 days.

It is important to know the right time to bring new ideas and processes into the workplace. New managers have a better sense of this when they take the time to interact with the employees. Ensure that the interaction is not a one-way street. Share your ideas and experiences openly and when asked to do so. Subordinates want to get to know you as well.

It also is important to remember to praise in public and criticize in private. It seems to be a common practice for new managers to praise privately and criticize publicly, which can destroy credibility, erode trust and divide the workplace. Every minute spent interacting with subordinates provides feedback that allows you to be successful during the first 100 days.

Conclusion

At the end of the 100th day, take the time to conduct an honest evaluation of how well you did in your plan. Determine whether you established the initiatives that you set out to establish and whether you have taken the right steps to improve workplace effectiveness. Once the self-evaluation is complete, understand that the work is only beginning. Take steps to expand your management plan and actively work toward new goals and milestones. The demands of the manager are never-ending. Employees look to their managers for constant guidance and support. The environment is ever changing and requires diligence and proactive management and leadership to evolve and grow. Responsible management plays a critical role in an organization's success. Employees need the trust and support of their managers. What is more important, they deserve the trust and support of their managers. &

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